2 Villiers · T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

443 505 439 (for the manner of headdress worn in the different parts of Arabia and East Africa varies considerably; what will sell well at Mukalla, for instance, will find no buyers at Kuwait; and the Arab is a stickler for style), sarongs from Java and Japan, amber and artificial beads of the kind the true Moslem loves to fondle, cigarettes in gay packages but of no advertised brand, cheap perfumes (which I have several times seen the sailors laboriously adulterating with water from the ship's tanks), small crocheted caps to go under turbans, money belts, caps of artificial leather and pullovers of extremely artificial wool, veils for the harem, basketware from the Hadhramaut, sometimes a little hashish or *qat*[1] — these are the sailors' ventures, and the profits are their own.

The sailors are inveterate smugglers; almost none of the goods they bring — apart from the main cargo — is declared. Since they leave from small ports along the coast of Arabia where official supervision, while thorough, is not organized to conform with the Europeans' idea of how trade should be conducted, and since so much of their more highly dutiable goods are private ventures, such manifests as they produce to the authorities are useless. The mariner buys his goods himself, and sells them himself (though he does not mind disposing of them to boats alongside). He sees no point in accepting any official interference, and to him the European on the East African coast is still an interloper, recently arrived and wholly unnecessary.

506 484 486 The passenger trade is an important one, particularly in the East African voyaging. Though the Italians in their colonies tried to regulate the movement of Arabs, and the growth of Indian influence in Mombasa and Zanzibar has much lessened Arab trade and opportunities, still thousands of Omani and Hadhramaut Arabs travel down the Benadir coast and to Zanzibar annually. Every dhow fit to go to sea — and quite a few which look as if they are not — carries her quota, and some of the overcrowding is incredible. Among 35 Arab dhows which were lying together at Mogadishu, in Italian Somaliland, in the season of 1939, the Italian immigration authorities checked 4,000 passengers. They

[1] A bush common to southern Arabia, especially the Yemen. The leaves, when chewed, are somewhat intoxicating.

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missed at least another 600, for no list which the dhows supply is really reliable, and each ship carries many persons who are without European documents. As a new dhow arrives, sometimes dozens of her passengers will drop quietly over the side and disperse themselves among the dhows already in the harbour. As with the disposal of the seamen's ventures, all Arabs take a delight, regardless of their ports of origin, in the general defeat of European regulations.

II

At first glance, the whole deep-sea trade in dhows seems unorganized and almost unregulated. In point of fact, it is very well organized indeed, and has a tradition going back, probably, some thousands of years. There is no association of dhow owners in Arabia as there is a Country Craft Organization on the west coast of India, for the Arab of today is too inherently disunited and fiercely individualist to make this type of co-operation possible. But he can organize his own trade very well, nevertheless. The typical wealthy business family of Kuwait maintains offices, almost always managed by sons of the house who frequently rotate on the circuit, in all the more important centers of Arab coastal trade. The head office is at Kuwait or perhaps Basra, with branches at Aden (in the Crater, not at Steamer Point), Bombay, possibly one other west coast of India port, and Mukalla. Where there is not an actual branch of the family conducting business on a permanent footing, there is either a trusted agent (probably a relative), or one of the younger sons sent in the trading season to watch the family interests. This, for instance, is done at Berbera, in British Somaliland, which, when times are good, can absorb a surprising quantity of Iraqi dates carried there in dhows. The agent or family member is primarily responsible for the collection of debts — always a problem in a trade which is carried on without banking. A family carrying on business on such a scale will have a finger in perhaps a score big dhows, all nominally "owned" by their own *nakhodas*. The cash resources of some of these families must be enormous, and behind them stands the Sheikh of Kuwait, who was a wealthy man even before oil was discovered in his territory.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

forbidding traffic in adult women;[26] in 1948 these same two countries failed to file reports on efforts to suppress traffic in women, children, and obscene publications.[27]

Slaving is difficult to stamp out, as the African victims are led to believe that their social status will be bettered. Actually, there is some truth in this, for an African, even as a slave, has a far better life in Arabia, since the Arabs treat their slaves fairly.

British regulations at Zanzibar provide that dhows must carry crew members voluntarily signed on and not in excess of that needed to sail the ship.[28] At Mombasa, *British Regulations for Native Vessels* provides that no man may be signed on as a seaman without satisfying the officials that he has voluntarily shipped, and further that no passengers are to be shipped without the knowledge of the authorities.[29] However, Villiers[30] relates that an Omani *sambuk* intentionally ran down a fishing canoe off Africa and 'saved' two Africans to be sold later as slaves in Arabia.

In essentially the same category as the slave is any other illegal or illicit trade. During World War I gun-running was at a high, but now the trade is not very prosperous. There is considerable cargo smuggled to avoid duties; tea and other goods are run to Persia by the Arabs on the Trucial Coast of Oman—the old Pirate Coast.

The customs and immigration officials in Africa do not have much use for the Arab deepwaterman, with his Arab passengers and smuggling crew. On the other hand, the Arab takes delight in deception, and attempts to confuse the European as much as possible. No large dhow ever carries a visible name; its papers usually contain an official name, but more often the dhow is known by the name of the *nakhoda*, who is usually the nominal owner.

As soon as an Arab dhow reaches an African port, the local officials try to get a passenger and crew list; in this they never succeed, as certain of the passengers always vanish into the native anchorage as soon as the anchor is down, to return after the survey is made. This is easy, as all the native craft are herded into a separated anchorage and often new arrivals have to drive into small spaces in the middle of the anchorage.

Few carry passports or other identification, so actual identification is

[26] J. L. Carver, 'Slavery's Last Stronghold,' *United Nations World*, II, No. 5 (June, 1948), 24-27.

[27] However, in all fairness it should be pointed out that the USSR, Afghanistan, Byelorussia, Honduras, Iceland, and Norway also failed to make reports on the grounds that the problem has not arisen in their countries.

[28] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 212.

[29] Ibid., p. 190.

[30] Ibid.

486 difficult, if not impossible. When shipping out of a port, an Arab simply gets approval from the port police and moves his chest aboard. However, in Africa some ports will not allow passengers to discharge; to get around this, the Arab *nakhoda* sometimes obtains permission for shore leave for some of his passengers, and brings back a different group, who want to leave. Sometimes as much as twenty per cent of a passenger list of several hundred may be shifted in a port, but the dhow still leaves with a full complement, so everyone is happy.

Regulations are a challenge to the Arab, although some of his disregard for regulations may be classed as nothing less than pure thievery. Villiers[21] relates how a Persian dhow managed to load two hundred tons of salt stolen from the Italians at Haifun in 1939. The salt was successfully loaded at night from small canoes, but the dhow was apprehended just as it was ready to sail, and the *nakhoda* was thrown into jail.

III

502 Arab navigation, on the run from Arabia down the African coast or 487 over to India, is little more than dead reckoning, and a poor brand at that. The only instrument the large Arab craft carries is a compass, which is assumed to give a true reading. Most Arabs have never heard of compass deviation and will not believe that a compass can give anything but a true reading. Besides a compass, the deep sea dhows sometimes carry a chart, which may be of surprisingly recent origin or of surprisingly ancient origin; Villiers[22] tells of once seeing an Arab pilot armed with a chart of the Indian Ocean corrected to 1746! A few Arabs carry Isa Kitamis' *Directory of Eastern Seas* in Arabic, which contains many useful descriptions of the landmarks which may be encountered.

However, as the Arab navigates, a 1746 chart and a faulty compass are ample for his needs, for he simply coasts along, usually in sight of land. Going down to Africa, he sails before the wind with land to starboard; returning he sails before the wind with land to port. The seas that he sails are like a book to him, and he seldom needs his chart; this is possible, as there are no reefs along the African way. When going to India the Arab proceeds in the same manner, coasting along. In going to Africa, the Arab may get out of sight of land while crossing the Gulf of Aden, but it is only a matter of a day or so, as the land is mountainous and high on both sides of the Gulf. In sailing the waters of the Persian Gulf, the dhow

[21] Ibid., p. 112.
[22] Ibid., p. 149.